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ON PAGE 2B

WASHINGTON TIMES
28 January 1985

Goldwater pins plot on pope to Bulgaria, assumes Soviet link

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By Walter Andrews
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Intelligence information indicates that Bulgaria was behind the plot to kill the pope but doesn't provide any Soviet connection, Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., said yesterday.

But the former chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee said he couldn't imagine why the Bulgarians would have attempted such an act on their own.

In an appearance yesterday on NBC's "Meet the Press," the senator said he saw less than a 50-50 chance of President

talks with the Soviet Union is scheduled to begin March 12 in Geneva.

Asked if he believed the Bulgarians were behind the attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II, Sen. Goldwater replied "Yes, I do."

"On the basis of the information that I've had available to me that hasn't been classified, I think the Bulgarians were in it," Mr. Goldwater said.

Since the assassination attempt, the CIA has consistently refused to confirm that there was any evidence linking the Bulgarians to the crime despite disclosures to the contrary by Italian authorities investigating the incident.

The Bulgarian intelligence agency is said to be controlled by the Soviet KGB.

Asked if the Bulgarians would have done it on their own, Mr. Goldwater said, "I can't imagine why."

On nuclear arms talks, Mr. Goldwater was asked what chance President Reagan had of leaving office in 1988 with a nuclear arms agreement.

"If you put that question on a scale of one to 10, I'll give it a three," the senator said.

Mr. Goldwater said he was not only in favor of reducing the number of nuclear weapons, but of eliminating them altogether.

His former opposition to continued production of the MX missile was based on a belief that the Soviets would not resume the talks.

"And now that the talks are going on and there's some evidence the MX could become a bargaining chip, I won't say right now I favor it. I won't say I oppose

it. Frankly, I think we have enough nuclear weapons," Sen. Goldwater said.

He said a freeze on defense spending proposed by a group of Republican senators led by Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., would result in a 38 percent cut in the \$313 billion defense budget the Reagan administration will send to Congress next week.

The three-year package proposed by some Republican senators aimed at cutting the \$200 billion annual budget deficit in half would result in even greater percentage cuts in the defense budget in the following two years.

"Now the military budget just can't take that kind of a cut," Sen. Goldwater said. He said, however, he was in favor of some reductions in the 1986 defense budget being prepared for Congress.

"On the basis of the information that I've had available to me that hasn't been classified, I think the Bulgarians were in it," Mr. Goldwater said.

Reagan completing an agreement on nuclear arms with the Soviets before the end of his second term in 1988.

The new chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee also said he no longer opposes the MX nuclear missile because the 10-warhead weapon has apparently become a bargaining chip in the nuclear arms talks.

The first session of the new round of